

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00180 061643Z

51

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 SAB-01 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DEAE-00 SNM-02 SAJ-01

ACDA-05 EB-07 SCCT-01 SAM-01 AID-05 /088 W

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R 061600Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2178

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 180

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS LE

SUBJECT: GOL INVADES TRIPOLI'S "OLD CITY"

1. ON JAN 5, PRIMIN SOLH, IN HIS CAPACITY AS MININTERIOR, PERSONALLY SUPERVISED JOINT ARMY-POLICE "CLEARING" OPERATION DESIGNED RE-ESTABLISH GOL PRESENCE AND AUTHORITY IN NARROW STREETS AND ALLEYS OF "OLD CITY" AREA OF TRIPOLI, LEBANON'S SECOND LARGEST CITY, WHERE A NUMBER OF LOCAL DESPERADOES VARIOUSLY WANTED FOR CRIMES (INCLUDING MURDER) HAD HITERTO BEEN HOLED UP WITH THEIR FOLLOWERS AND INTIMIDATING LOCAL CITIZENRY. SOME FORTY ARMORED VEHICLES WERE REPORTEDLY EMPLOYED TO ENCIRCLE AND ASSAULT THE OUTLAWS. TWO PERSONS WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED AND TWELVE WOUNDED, WHILE 75 ARRESTS WERE MADE. NUMBER OF ARMS CACHES AS WELL AS QUANTITIES OF HASHISH WERE SEIZED BY LEBANESE AUTHORITIES. AT LATEST REPORT, SEVERAL REMAINING OUTLAW CHIEFTAINS WERE STILL BESEIGED SOMEWHERE IN OLD CITY AND ALLEGEDLY WERE HOLDING NUMBER OF CIVILIAN HOSTAGES.

2. IN WAKE OF OPERATION, PRIMIN SOLH STATED HE HAD ATTEMPTED UPON ASSUMING OFFICE TO RESOLVE TRIPOLI SECURITY PROBLEM BY EXERCISING PEACEFUL PERSUASION ON OUTLAWS VIA PROMINENT TRIPOLITAN LEADERS AND POLITICIANS. HOWEVER, HE FINALLY CON-
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00180 061643Z

CLUDED THAT LATTER POSSESSED NO INFLUENCE OVER OUTLAWS.

SOLH THEN WAITED, HE EXPLAINED, UNTIL AFTER HOLIDAY SEASON TO TAKE DIRECT ACTION, ADDING: "THE GOVT. IS DETERMINED TO ENSURE AUTHORITY OF LAW AND ORDER IN ALL PARTS OF COUNTRY WHERE OUTLAWS ARE HIDING."

3. COMMENT: SINCE COMING TO POWER LAST FALL, SOLH HAD PUBLICLY PROMISED ACTION TO COPE WITH DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION IN TRIPOLI, WHERE EXPLOSIONS OF ARMED VIOLENCE BETWEEN OUTLAWS AND LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES HAD BECOME FREQUENT OCCURENCE IN RECENT MONTHS. BECAUSE HE APPEARED MORE INCLINED TO TALK THAN ACT, HOWEVER, PUBLIC EXPECTATION OF DECISIVE ACTION WAS NOT HIGH AND YESTERDAY'S OPERATION CAME AS SURPRISE.

4. WHILE SECURITY CONDITIONS IN TRIPOLI WERE CERTAINLY RIPE (OR EVEN LONG OVERDUE) FOR GOL ATTENTION, CITY'S OUTLAWS ARE OF COURSE BY NO MEANS LEBANON'S WORST INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEM. CAN BE ARGUED, IN FACT, THAT ACUTE PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY FEDAYEEN PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY, HOME-GROWN "MILITIA" GANGS, AND UNRESTRAINED TRIGGER-HAPPINESS OF MOST OF THIS COUNTRY'S MALE CITIZENS LED GOL TO "PICK ON" TARGET IT KNEW IT COULD LICK. IN ANY EVENT, PRIMIN SOLH HAS AT LEAST DEMONSTRATED COMMENDABLE DEGREE OF ENERGY. REMAINS TO BE SEEN TO WHAT EXTENT HIS TRIPOLI SUCCESS WILL ENCOURAGE HIM TO ATTACK THE MYRIAD OTHER PROBLEMS-- POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC-- WHICH INCREASINGLY BEDEVIL LEBANON.
GODLEY

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